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ABSTRACT

A study incorporated Donald Felker's 5 Keys to Self-Concept Enhancement in 20 minutes of timed writing weekly or bi-weekly for three months using the Coopersmith Adult Form as pre-post measure. Felker's 5 Keys are: (1) adults, praise yourselves; (2) help children evaluate realistically; (3) teach children to set realistic goals; (4) teach children to praise themselves; and (5) teach children to praise others. Subjects, 53 alternative high school language arts students at Kinney High School, Folsom-Cordova Unified School District, California were randomly assigned to control or experimental treatment with Felker's 5 Keys. Results indicated self-concept as measured by the Coopersmith increased significantly for the experimental group compared to the control group due largely to the regression of the control group's males and improvement of the experimental group's male and female scores. Females in the experimental group improved their scores at the posttest 3.5 times more than the females in the control group did. Males in the experimental group improved slightly at posttest while the control group males regressed considerably. These results support the efficacy of a regular writing assignment focusing on Felker's 5 Keys to Enhance Self-Concept among adolescents. (Thirty-three references are attached.) (RAE)

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Felker's Five Keys To Self-Concept Enchancement: Secondary Classroom Research

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This study incorporated Donald Felker's 5 Keys to Self-Concept Enhancement in 20 minutes of timed writing weekly or bi-weekly for three months using the Coopersmith Adult Form as pre-post measure. Language arts classes at Kinney High School, Folsom-Cordova Unified School District, California were randomly assigned to control or experimental treatment with Felker's 5 Keys as an independent variable. The control classes wrote for the same 20 minutes weekly or bi-weekly on the same designated days but on topics other than on Felker's 5 Keys. Self-concept as measured by the Coopersmith increased significantly for the experimental group compared to the control group due largely to the regression of the control group's males and improvement of the experimental group's male and female scores. The experimental females improved their scores at post-test 3½ times the control female's improvement. The experimental males improved slightly at post-test while the control males regressed considerably. These results tend to support the efficacy of a regular writing assignment focusing on Felker's 5 Keys to Enhance Self-Concept among adolescents.

Felker (1974) defines self-concept as the sum total of the view which an individual has of himself. He views self-concept as a "unique set of perceptions, ideas, and attitudes which an individual has about himself" (p.2). Felker views self-perception as including all sensory input filtered and interpreted by the receiver, input pertaining to the self. Perceptions are received from the environment; ideas are developed from perceptions and could be defined as internal thoughts about the self. Such ideas and internal thoughts develop into positive or negative attitudes regarding self.

Such internal language regarding self is especially important to Felker's 5 Keys to Self-Concept Enhancement with the awareness of how early such inner language begins. McCandless (1969) asserted that the development of real language at 18 months to 2 years is the beginning of the self-concept with "concept" defined as the attachment of a name to something encompassing several variables, some of which distinguish one thing from other things. Concept of "self" or "me" is a set of characteristics distinguishing self from others in the environment. The early influence of self-talk upon the self-concept is noted by Felker:

> "Much of what is known about self-concept can be explained by the proposition that the child who has a positive self-concept has learned to give himself positive self-referent verbal feedback and that the child who has a negative self-concept has not learned to do this. The child with a negative self-concept has likely learned to give himself negative verbal feedback or he has not learned to talk to

himself and therefore does not give himself much feedback at all." (Felker, 1974, p. 36)

That the self-concept is developed and maintained by a system of self-referent language (Felker, 1970) perhaps serves to explain many of the known relationships between self-concept and other variables (i.e. anxiety, academics). It seems reasonable, too, that positive self-referent language would probably influence one's sense of belonging, of competence, and of work, factors frequently discussed as those making up one's self-esteem. By definition, Felker (1974) views self-esteem as either a process or a product. As a product, self-esteem may mean high self-regard or a favorable self-opinion. As a process, it may mean to regard self with respect or affection, to set a value on self, or to rate self highly. For the purpose of this study, self-concept and self-esteem largely will share definitions, although the two could be more fully differentiated.

Felker's 5 Keys to Self-Concept Enhancement are based in the view that the self-concept is learned through operant conditioning (people tend to do those things that are reinforced) and that people often learn by observation and imitation. Skinner's operant conditioning needs no discussion here. Much has already been written and is common knowledge. Observation and imitation, however, may require more explication. Imitation has been found to be a powerful force in learning everything from simple motor tasks to values and cognitive skills (Felker and Milhollan, 1970). Children are probably left to imagine for themselves, however, what

significant adults (parents, teachers) are thinking or saying to themselves. Felker (1974) asserts that if children are to learn how to treat themselves (how to give positive self-referent speech), they must have models who can teach them by imitation. Felker's first Key to Self-Concept Enhancement then, is:

Key 1: Adults, Praise Yourselves

Such praise/encouraging self-referent language provides a model at home or in the classroom. The adult verbally shares normally inner language, perhaps, by first praising his/her own work and then moving to praising personal qualities. The goal of positive self-referent speech is to allow the child to be an independent, self-motivated individual with a positive self-concept (Felker & Stanwyck, 1973). Felker (1974) observes, too, that teachers have learned to see themselves in more positive ways by employing the Five Keys in their classrooms. Also, training teachers in the Five Keys has resulted in more positive self-concept scores for their pupils, less anxiety, and fewer failure experiences (Felker, Stanwyck, & Kay, 1973). Also, the focus is more upon progress than perfection, a perspective probably far more conducive to a favorable self-concept.

Key 2: Help Children Evaluate Realistically

Felker's Key 2 observes that realistic self-evaluations may play a central role in the use of self-referent positive language as a mechanism for maintaining a positive self-concept. The person of negative self-concept makes unrealistically high demands upon the self (Jersild, 1963), judging self on the basis of unattainable

perfection. Or, the low self-concept person may set goals so low that anyone could attain them (Kay, 1972). A realistic evaluation of self should be based on past performance of that individual in specific areas not on a global criterion. Progress toward personally-defined success should be the goal. J. Paul Myer (Success Motivation Institute) often quoted definition of success is helpful: "Success is one step, however small, in the direction of a predetermined, worthwhile goal based on one's own potential." Improvement is reason enough for self-praise and self-encouragement.

Key 3: Teach Children to Set Realistic Goals

Closely connected with Key 2, Felker's (1974) Key 3 sees realistic goal-setting as requiring three characteristics: (a) they must be individual goals; (b) they must be made in relation to past performance; and (c) they must have both a goal and an end in view.

For a goal to be meaningful, it must be personally set by the student, set slightly higher than previous performance (Kay, 1972), and written so that it is specific with a point of beginning and an end goal with indications of small steps in between. Carkhuff's Systematic Helping Skills "Program Development" stage is a useful model (Carkhuff, 1984).

Key 4: Teach Children to Praise Themselves

Felker (1974) observes that all Keys are designed to increase individual self-control; perhaps, to further an internal locus-of-control, a concept associated with many positive mental health variables (Rotter, 1966; Lefcourt, 1976). The goal is to have the student as his/her own evaluator and reinforcer, allowing verbal

reinforcement even without the teacher's verbal reinforcement. A set of positive words and phrases which the child learns to apply to the self is a powerful mechanism for self-esteem (Felker, 1974). Self-encouraging and self-praising statements can be highly supportive.

Key 5: Teach Children to Praise Others

Key 5 relates to Key 4. Self-praise and praise of others are positively related (Coons & McEachern, 1967). Apparently, when one learns to self-encourage and praise, encouraging/praising others may naturally follow. Also, encouraging/praising others results in favorable input from others ("What goes around, comes around.") probably increasing one's self-encouragement/praise.

METHOD

Subjects and Setting

The subjects were ultimately 53 alternative high school language arts students (Kinney High School, Rancho Cordova, California) enrolled in the author's classes during mid-September through mid-December. Twelve students who transferred out of the six classes involved in this study due to early graduation, moving to a new residence, changing to independent study, etc. were not included in post-assessment. Excluding these students, a total number (N) is 53. Alternative high school youth at the site ranged in age from 16 to 18. The site is a continuation high school with the Folsom-Cordova Unified School District, California, resting on its own location two miles from the larger comprehensive high school. Grades 9-12 are included in each class of individualized instruction in basic academic areas with some electives offered (auto shop, ornamental horticulture, recreation). Classes are of reduced size of roughly 15

students to allow for individualization.

Instrumentation

The Coopersmith Inventory (Adult Form, 1975, 1981, published by Consulting Psychologist Press) was employed as the pre-post measure of self-concept/self-esteem. The Coopersmith consists of 25 items adapted from the school short form. It is for use with persons aged 16 and above. Each item is a brief statement that the student responds to by checking "Like Me' or "Unlike Me" boxes. The total score of positive self-image/esteem items is then multiplied by 4, indicating a possible perfect score of 100. Validity and reliability data on the Coopersmith scales have been done largely on the School Form (Internal Consistency: Spatz & Johnston, 1973; Kimball, 1972; Stability: Rubin, 1978; Drummond, McIntire, & Ryan, 1973; Coopersmith, 1967; Fullerton, 1972; Bedeian, Geagud, & Zmud, 1977; Alternate Forms: Battle, 1977, comparing the Canadian SEI with the Coopersmith School Form; Construct Validity: Kokenes, 1974, 1978; Kimball, 1972; Concurrent Validity; Simon & Simon, 1975; Predictive Validity: Donaldson, 1974; Coopersmith, 1967; Simon & Bernstein, 1971; Simon, 1972; Many, 1973; Goodstadt & Kipnes, 1971; Matheson, 1974.).

Generally favorable data were obtained in these studies with the Coopersmith School Form. The correlation of total scores on the School Short Form and the Adult Form exceeds .80 for three samples of high school and college students (N = 647) (Coopersmith, 1984).

Procedures

Six language arts classes taught by the author were randomly assigned to control or experimental treatment. Control classes were

periods 2, 4 and 7; experimental classes were periods 1, 3 and 6. Therefore, there were two control and two experimental morning classes and one control and experimental class in the afternoon. Students attended either in the morning or in the afternoon for three hours per day of instruction at the school.

As students enrolled at the site and became language art students assigned to control or experimental classes, they immediately were presented the Coopersmith Adult Form as a vehicle "to learn more about them." With only rare discomfort, all entering students took the pre-test given the day of individual enrollment during September.

The experimental treatment began 26 September as a part of weekly/bi-weekly (9sessions) "timed writing," an adaptation from the Area III Writing Project (Anne Dryden McKeever). Partially patterned after McKeever's "Writing for Quantity, Quality, and Pride" (Woodland Joint Unified School District, California), control and experimental students were instructed to write for 20 minutes on assigned topics with quantity as the chief goal. A somewhat noisy timer was set and was placed prominently for students to observe time passage. Control students wrote on highly motivational topics, such as, "Horrible Beginnings" (McKeever) (i.e. "Out of the bubbly mud came...," "From his nose crawled..."; "Growling and snarling it..."), and "You are a parking meter. Describe your experiences during the day," and "Write a story using these items: red raincoat, man, woman, a bright color, touch, and odor," and story starters attributable to Jerry Fishman of Sacramento Community College, such as, "You open your eyes and discover that you are enmeshed in a spider's web. You start to thrash in the strong, sticky ropes, and suddenly...," and

"Who was Snow White's eighth Dwarf and why did she keep him a secret?" and character descriptions. After the 20 minutes of timed writing, students would count the number of lines completed and write this number on their timed writing cover sheet that also included their name, the date, and the topic. Then, the creations were frequently read by the instructor or by brave students, and friendly critique offered. The instructor used these weekly writings to individualize writing assignments, focusing on one/two area(s) for remediation. The writings themselves, however, were generally not returned to be rewritten. Timed writing here was to reduce writing block and encourage creative expression without fear of failure.

The experimental classes, too, performed timed writing, but topics related to Felker's 5 Keys were introduced, explained and discussed before the writing began. The instructor presented the 5 Keys in an order that seemed appropriate to him: Key 1, 4, 5, 2, and 3. The Key being discussed was prominently displayed during the introductory period and remained displayed throughout the three month period. The instructor carefully removed the Keys from the view of the control group classes. Felker's 1974 publication served as a core for each Key presentation. The discussion that followed was unique to each experimental group class; however, a customary response was for the class majority favorably to receive the input with 1-3 negatively to receive the input and be resistant to the subsequent timed writing. In retrospect, the Coopersmith scores for these few students might have been of interest for added statistical analysis. Perhaps these resistant students were of the lowest pre-test self-esteem.

Keys 1 and 4 (Adults, Praise Yourselves; Teach Others to Praise Themselves) required several timed writing exercises under the "Positive Self-Talk" category. Students wrote with a guided worksheet on "What to Praise/Encourage in Yourself" based on Felker's 1974, page 72. They listed positive self-descriptors with the admonition to carry the list with them and to place it in a prominent home location. They wrote on "Things I like about Myself" and received a synopsis of the noteworthy points of all three experimental group classes. They developed 30-second radio commercials about themselves on actual radio stationery given 2 examples of such efforts. As with the control classes, student responses to these assignments were read after the 20 minutes of timed writing. Requests not to read were honored.

Of course, positive self-referent talk was modeled by the instructor regularly during treatment for the experimental classes and he wrote with the experimental and control classes as they wrote during timed writing.

Key 5, teaching the students to praise/encourage others, was a logical next focus. In addition to Felker's discussion, feedback was discussed using the format "When you_____, I feel _____," a feedback format attributed to psychologists Drs. Hill and their Hill Interaction Matrix. The "People I Like and Why" assignment was unusually well-received, perhaps because the focus was now on others rather than on self. Praising/encouraging others verbally, by task, and/or by writing was encouraged with "Happy News Telegrams" given to each student.

Keys 2 and 3 (Evaluate Self Realistically; Set Reasonable Goals) were incorporated into Keys 1, 4 and 5, although they were individually discussed. "Self-Talk" goals and "Praise/Encouraging Others" goals were encouraged.

RESULTS

A simple "T" test on male and female students and on the combined groups was performed for control and experimental groups for the dependent variable self-concept/esteem, using the Coopersmith Adult Form as pre/post measure.

Table 1 shows Control Male regression from pre-to-post testing with a net Control Group regression despite a modest average gain in self-concept/esteem among Control Females. Experimental Males and Females both gained in Coopersmith self-concept/esteem in pre-to-post testing with Experimental Females showing the larger gain. Figure 1 presents a graphic depiction of the Control and Experimental pre-post relationship.

Table 1

Pre and post test means and change scores for Control and Experimental Males and Females on the Coopersmith Adult Form (N = 53)

Group	N	Pre-Test $\bar{X}$	Post-Test $\bar{X}$	Change
Control Males	13	69.23	58.46	-10.76
Control Females	11	58.18	60.72	+2.54
Total	24	64.16	59.00	-4.66
Experimental Males	19	62.31	65.05	+2.73
Experimental Females	10	62.40	71.20	+8.80
Total	29	62.34	67.17	+4.82

$\bar{X}$ = 67.17
(post-test Experimental Group)

$\bar{X}$ = 64.16
(pre-test Control Group)

$\bar{X}$ = 62.34
(pre-test Experimental Group)

$\bar{X}$ = 59.50
(post-test Control Group)

Note: The indicated slopes are not geometrically precise and are intended only broadly to suggest a pattern.

Figure 1

Control and Experimental Pre-Post Test Self-Concept/Esteem Means on the Coopersmith Adult Form (N = 53)

Table 2 shows the statistical significance of the difference between Control and Experimental Females' mean change from pre-to-post testing, the Control and Experimental Males mean change and the combined gender groups for Control and Experimental.

Table 2

Mean change and statistical significance for Control and Experimental Females in Comparison, for Control and Experimental Males in comparison, and for combined Females and Males Experimental versus Control Groups.

Female	N	Mean Change	T-Stat.	Sig.
Control	11	+2.54	-1.14	NS
Experimental	10	+8.80		
df =	19			
Male	**N**	**Mean Change**	**T-Stat.**	**Sig.**
Control	13	-10.76	-2.69	.01
Experimental	19	+2.73		
df =	30			
Male And Female Combined	**N**	**Mean Change**	**T-Stat.**	**Sig.**
Control	24	-4.66	-2.44	-.01 to -.02
Experimental	29	+4.82		
df =	51			

Although the Experimental Females showed greater gain in Coopersmith self-concept/self-esteem from pre-to-post testing compared to the Control Females, the difference was not significant at the minimal .05 level of confidence. The Experimental Males, however, showed statistically significant pre-post gain compared to the Control Males who showed considerable regression. With genders combined, the Experimental Group showed statistically significant pre-post gain compared to the Control Group.

Figures 2 and 3 graphically present these data showing Control and Experimental pre-post Coopersmith means where gender is considered.

$\bar{X}$
69.23
(pre-test Control Males)

$\bar{X}$
60.72
(post-test Control Females)

$\bar{X}$
58.46
(post-test Control Males)

$\bar{X}$
58.18
(pre-test Control Females)

Figure 2

Pre-post-Test Coopersmith Self-Concept/Esteem Means for Control Females and Control Males.

$\bar{X}$
71.2
(post-test Experimental Females)

$\bar{X}$
65.05
(post-test Experimental Males)

$\bar{X}$
62.4
(pre-test Experimental Females)

$\bar{X}$
62.32
(pre-test Experimental Males)

Figure 3

Pre-post-Test Coopersmith Self-Concept/Esteem Means for Experimental Females and Experimental Males.

DISCUSSION

Apparently, the regression of the Control Group Males with the increase in Coopersmith self-concept/esteem for both experimental males and females accounts for the significant difference from pre to post-testing favoring the experimental treatment. The introduction of Felker's 5 Keys to Self-Concept Enhancement within a "timed writing" context over a three month period does make a positive, significant difference in self-concept/esteem.

However, of interest is that the Control Men began at such a high level at pre-test, speculatively perhaps a reflection of a desire to perceive self unrealistically favorably through denial as an ego defense. The Control Men's post-test average approximates the Control Females' pre-test result ($\bar{X}$ = 58), near the normative average reported for 11th graders ($\bar{X}$ = 59) (Ketcham and Morse, 1965). The Control Men's post-test may represent a more honest self-appraisal, suggesting actually an increase in ego-strength probably seen in such more candid self-disclosure.

The especially positive growth of the Experimental Females reflects a prior-reported greater change due to treatment on the part of adolescent females over males (Bernhoft, 1981). Bernhoft's study found high school females self-actualization tendencies to increase more due to experimental treatment (group communication/counseling class) in comparison to males in the study. Several normative Coopersmith studies show adolescent females slightly higher in self-esteem, although generally non-significantly higher (Coopersmith, 1984). The Control Men's post-test position slightly below the control Females' post-test mean is the relationship between male and female Coopersmith

data often reported. Should the Control Men's pre-test results be spuriously high and questionably valid, the level of significance favoring the experimental treatment would be, of course, reduced. Even with such an analysis, the Five Keys "timed writing" experimental treatment shows a trend of efficacy for both male and female subjects.

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